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ABSTRACT

These five articles offer ideas on rural education, school consolidation, and community-based educational improvement initiatives. The first article, by Boyd Kidwell, gives a status report of rural schools, which are saddled by declining enrollments, fewer dollars, and demands for higher standards. Examples in Georgia, Texas, and Missouri are used to illustrate rural-urban differences, and these examples raise questions about the benefits of school consolidation. A Texas community's effort to save its small school is also described. The second article, by Des Keller, describes a preschool education improvement program in Wilmot, Arkansas. The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) teaches parents how to help their children at home. The article also describes a Georgia high school's dropout prevention program, a Tennessee education equity movement, and a field-trip program in Nebraska. The third article, by Nancy Dorman-Hickson, describes the use of satellites and cable TV linkages to offer courses not ordinarily available to rural students. Equipment costs and funding sources are also described. The fourth article, by Boyd Kidwell, discusses the rural teacher shortage and teacher quality. Teachers are profiled and their efforts in dropout prevention, early childhood education, poverty, and community involvement are described. The fifth article, by Nancy Dorman-Hickson, describes the Houlka (Mississippi) Organization for Pupil Education (HOPE), a rural community's fund-raising and educational facilities improvement effort. A final summary section suggests ways that rural communities might find funding, support teachers, cultivate community involvement, and come up with creative teaching tools. The booklet also includes a list of 10 agencies offering assistance to rural educators. (TES)

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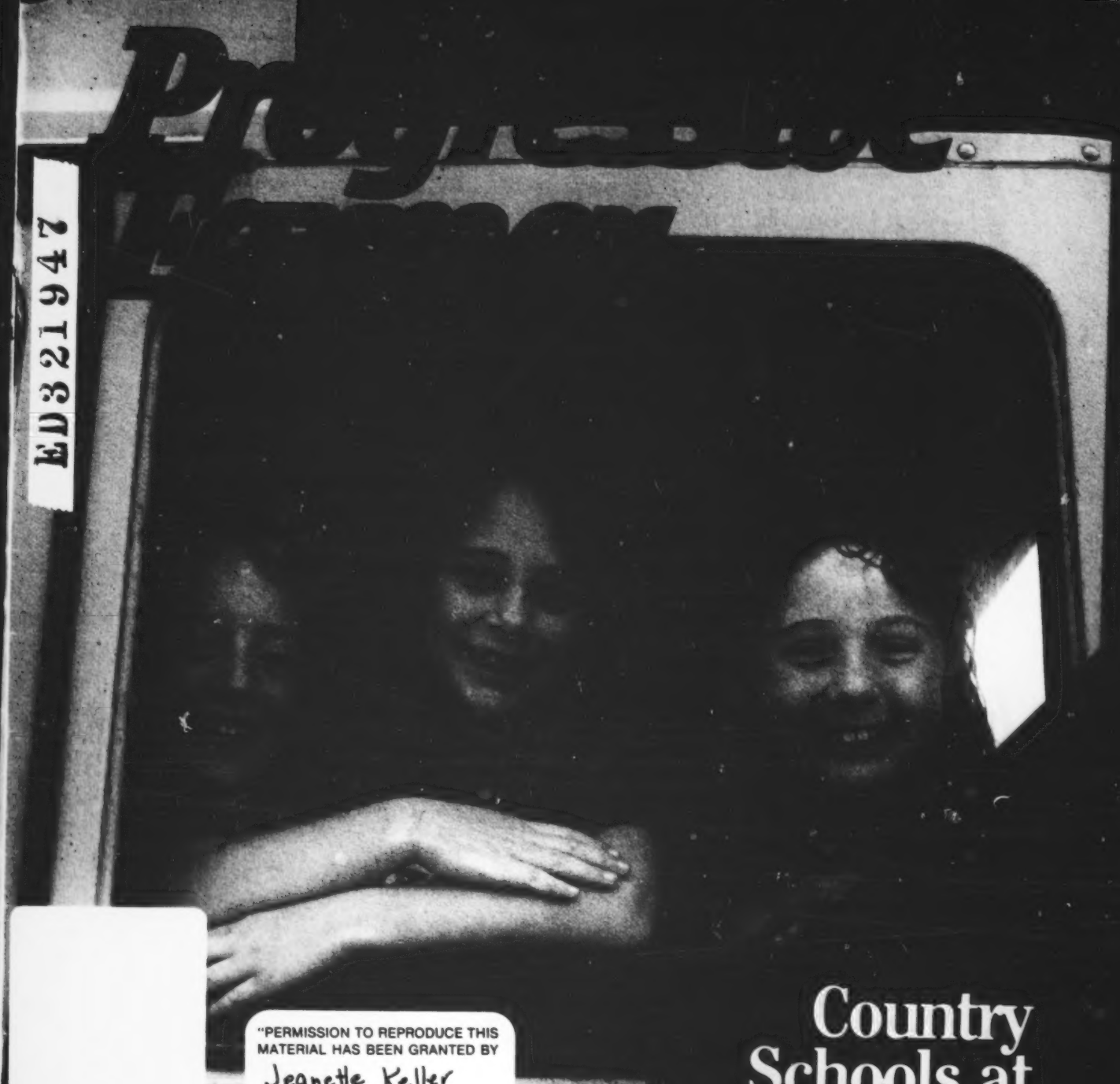

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Country Schools at the Crossroads

A five-part series about ideas and programs that are being used to improve rural education.

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Editors' Note

We are at once proud and humble regarding the stories about rural education offered in this special reprinted edition. We are proud of the depth and breadth of the topics covered and proud of the success stories we found.

Humbleness comes from the knowledge that we have no sure-fire cures for the problems your rural school may face. Districts will still be consolidated. Long schoolbus rides will still be a fact. And the need for a new roof over the gymnasium may go unmet.

But we do offer ideas, and isn't that where any good educational process begins? More accurately, educators, parents, students, and communities offered the ideas. *Progressive Farmer* just passed them along.

You won't have to read very far into any one of these stories before you'll notice the common denominator. These communities support the idea of a good education and back it up with time, effort, money, and love.

The first copy of this reprint is free. Additional copies are $1.50 each, which covers the cost of printing and mailing.

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RURAL EDUCATION

Country Schools at the Crossroads

A beef cow or an Angora goat might graze past an open window of The Divide Elementary School on the Edwards Plateau in Texas. But it won't disrupt class.

The nine students are ranch kids who see cattle and goats every day. Just because the two-room school is in a cow pasture, don't be fooled into thinking that the education delivered here isn't first-rate.

"My kids are turned on to school," says Mindy Gray, whose daughter and son attend The Divide Elementary School. "They get up in the morning and want to go to school."

Today's rural students operate computers, learn foreign languages, and receive instruction from specialized teachers via satellite dishes. Fleets of yellow buses pick up and deliver the kids each day.

But keeping rural schools going is a challenge. Teacher shortages, money problems, and even a lack of students have killed off weak schools. In 1930, there were 128,000 school districts in the U.S. By 1985, the number of school districts had dropped to 15,700.

The town of Fargo, Ga. (population 250), which borders the Okefenokee Swamp, nearly lost its elementary school last year. Because the number of students fell below standards set by the state, the department of education wanted to close the school and send the 60 students 37 miles away to Homerville.

"The kids who lived near the swamp would have had a 100-mile bus ride, round trip," says Fargo Principal E. A. Griffis. "It's hard for me to believe that a kid could ride that far and function well in class."

But the residents of this timber and farming community held on to their school. They asked their legislators to pursue funding through a program for isolated schools. Now, the fate of the school depends on a year-to-year legislative effort to keep this special funding.

"The school is the heart of our community," says Carolyn Hall, who has been secretary there for 30 years.

"Even though it's small, this school isn't doing a bad job," Hall contends. "In some areas, when they compare us with big city schools, we don't do as well. But in other areas, we're ahead. We've had doctors and college professors come out of the Fargo school."

Out on the Edwards Plateau the supporters of The Divide Elementary School express strong emotions for their small school too. With two teachers and only nine students in kindergarten through sixth grade, the school and the church next door literally are The Divide.

"My 6th-grade daughter is reading on the 12th-grade level, and my kindergartner is reading 1st-grade books," says Mindy Gray. "The teachers are doing the job there and then some."

"I feel our daughter will get a better education by going to the small school," says Walter Schreiner, who is one of the owners of YO Ranch near The Divide. "We've fought for 10 years to keep that school open, but it has been worth it."

Thanks to a unified community effort, The Divide appears to have a solid grip on the future of its two-room schoolhouse.

Across the country, other rural areas are fighting to save and improve their schools.

When farmer Lowell Tucker surveyed his fellow residents of Newtown, Mo., for a community development effort, they told him that their local school, with its 100 students, was their No. 1 priority.

Lack of money and lack of students are the two biggest obstacles for Newtown (population 270). To support the school, residents pay $5.80 per $100 of property valuation. Local taxes contribute $170,000 of the system's $570,000 annual budget.

Newtown is one of the smallest of Missouri's 544 systems, but the system ranks 11th in dollars spent per child on education. "The community has made a real commitment to these students," says Superintendent Garold Barney. When Newtown's gymnasium needed painting this past spring, the school bought the paint and community volunteers did the work.

Even with the backing of the community, Newtown's school faces an uphill battle. What worries Barney most is the lack of students. There were only 16 seniors in the graduating class of 1988. Grades 9 through 12 have only 18 students. Unless new

(Left) Busing students from their rural communities to larger schools that are centrally located can have a negative effect on the kids' school work. Photo: Vann Cleveland

(Center) Students and their school were the top priorities in a rural development survey of Newtown, Mo., residents. Photo: Mack Thomas

(Center, below) These ranch kids are turned on to education, say parents from The Divide, Tex. Photo: Vann Cleveland

(Below) The schoolday drags on for a child who catches a bus early in the morning and rides home late in the afternoon.
Photo: Vann Cleveland

students move into the area, Newtown may have a ratio of one teacher for every three students in high school.

"That's great for education, but not ideal for the budget," says Barney. "The next three years are the most critical. After that, I expect enrollment to turn around.

"Of course, this isn't a new phenomenon," adds Barney, who holds a doctorate in education from the University of California at Berkeley. "Newtown's class of 1940 had only one student."

Today, schools in communities such as Newtown, The Divide, and Fargo are under pressure to consolidate into larger systems. The thinking of most education experts during the 1960's and 1970's was that closing small schools and busing the students

to large, modern facilities was best for rural education.

But leading educators now say that small schools don't necessarily turn out poor students.

"The idea of the school as a community center and the idea of serving the total needs of the child are at the forefront of education nationally," says Jeffrey Bowen, an administrator with the New York School Boards Association.

"Small rural schools are custom-made to test these ideas," he adds.

Teri Schreiner noticed the same thing as she taught science as a volunteer to children ranging in age from 5 to 12 at The Divide. "At first, it felt strange teaching children of different ages," she says. "But it was so neat to see the way they helped each other. It was like they were all brothers and sisters."

For a while, it was thought that consolidated school systems and big, new buildings would automatically offer a better education. Looking back, however, it's obvious that faceless, centralized schools aren't necessarily turning out better equipped citizens than the old one-room schools.

Says Bowen, "From what we now know, it's not the size of the school but the length of the bus ride that is the biggest negative influence on a rural child's education."

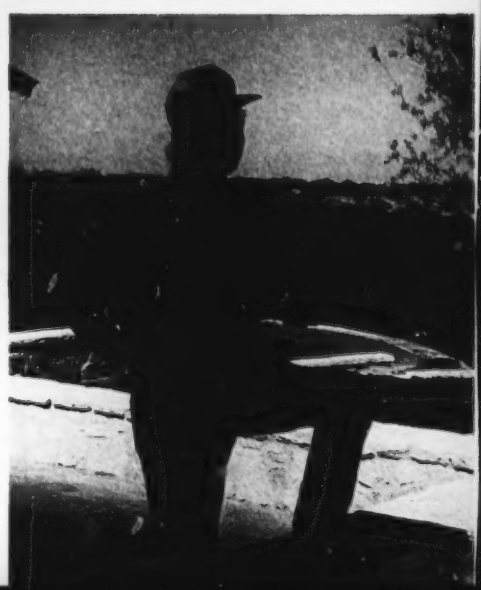
In an Iowa study, students from rural schools were compared with kids from city schools. A higher percentage of rural kids graduated from high school, entered college, and graduated with a degree.

Students from rural areas also showed up well in a 1988 research article written by Austin Swanson, a professor of education at the State University of New York in Buffalo. In Swanson's study, only 18% of the students from small school districts were below the state's minimum competency for sixth-grade reading. Urban students recorded 39% below this standard.

Children from suburbia were the best readers, with only 15% of them testing below minimum competency. Of course, children from suburbs are generally raised in homes where parents have high levels of income and education compared with parents of rural and inner city children.

The New York report also says that 12th-grade achievement improved until high school enrollment reached 1,200 students. When enrollment was above 1,600 students, achievement went downhill.

A 1986 study by the U.S. Department of Education reports that participation rates in extracurricular activities are greater for high schools with 200 or fewer seniors. In larger



***(Above)** Newtown, Mo., farmer Lowell Tucker leads the discussion as parents plan to save their children's school.* Photo: Mack Thomas

***(Above, right)** Satellites and dishes help make it possible for students in remote areas to receive first-rate instruction.* Photo: Vann Cleveland

***(Right)** Ranch owner Walter Schreiner believes his daughter will receive a top-quality education in The Divide's two-room school.* Photo: Vann Cleveland

schools, a few students dominate the extracurricular activities. In smaller schools, nearly every student becomes involved.The study concludes that smaller schools are better if graduates want a well-rounded experience. If a student wants to specialize in a subject, a larger school may provide more opportunity.

One way kids from rural schools differ from city kids is that rural students' Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores are not as accurate in predicting college success, says Jim Wild. He is executive associate dean of the College of Agriculture at Texas A&M. Wild thinks rural students often score lower on these standardized tests because they aren't as well prepared for these types of evaluations as are students from large schools.

"A lot of good kids from rural communities don't get access to money [scholarships and grants] to come to A&M or any other major university because of the increasing pressure from SAT scores and because so many students are applying from large communities," says Wild.

Texas A&M is considering the establishment of a STARS (Small Town and Rural Scholarship) program that will generate new scholarship resources for rural students. If this program can be developed, the criteria for admission to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M will be broadened. This means that involvement in FFA, 4-H, or other groups that demonstrate initiative and leadership will be taken into consideration.

Regardless of size, schools in rural areas are coming up with innovative ways of introducing their students to subjects that would have seemed far-out a few years ago. Students in rural Oklahoma and Tennessee, for example, can learn German or calculus from topnotch teachers based at Oklahoma State University. These lessons are carried to the country classrooms through satellites and dishes. An Alabama program called Bioprep prepares students in rural areas for medical studies and other professional fields.

Looking below the surface and past raw statistics, the situation doesn't seem as dismal as the national report card indicates. Kids in rural areas have a better chance for a high-quality education today than ever before. And adults are taking a more active role in local education.

The key may be that rural people often view their school as the heart and soul of the community. They care about the students—even if those students are neighbors' children and not their own.

"I don't have any children," says Carolyn Hall, the school secretary in Fargo, Ga., "just these 58 here at the school."

By BOYD KIDWELL

United Parents Save The Divide

After receiving full accreditation in 1988, the people of The Divide voted to change their school district from a "common" one to an "independent" district. This change gave The Divide residents control over their school and nearly doubled the local property taxes. But the decision was almost unanimous. On the day of the vote, 78% of the registered voters turned out. Only one marked a "no" ballot.

Accreditation in 1988 really began earlier. To take control of their elementary school's destiny, the school board took steps to reach full accreditation with the state board of education. To meet the requirements, people from the community volunteered to teach subjects such as science, art, foreign languages, math, and music. A volunteer also acted as principal and went through more than 100 hours of training.

After the tax increase, new money became available. More time and money were devoted to the school's library and reading program. A superintendent and a teacher were hired on a part-time basis so that volunteer teachers were no longer needed.

Although it's small, The Divide's school has a strong tradition of turning out well-rounded students who have become doctors, professors, and lawyers. Photo: Vann Cleveland

Now the students receive instruction in drama, art, Spanish, computers, and gymnastics. National standardized tests indicate the kids compare favorably with students in bigger schools.

Grownups in The Divide say they will fight to keep the school open for the kids. But they also admit it's important to the survival of the community.

"The school really serves as a focus for this community," says rancher and former School Board President Cathie Klein Keblinger. "Without the school and the little church next to it, The Divide would probably cease to exist."

RURAL EDUCATION

Dollars Making Sense in Rural Education

The ability to finance a rural school district is no guarantee that the students will shine. In Wilmot, Ark., that lesson has been all too apparent.

Jackson Currie, a farmer and then-bachelor member of the school board, had grown tired of watching the students' abilities erode. First-graders in the Mississippi Delta town consistently had some of the worst scores in the state on standardized tests.

"Their test scores were so low that there was only one explanation," says Currie, a man who looks like he'd be more at home in a farm shop than in an education think-tank. "Whatever problems students had were occurring before they ever got to school."

Many of Wilmot's children weren't learning things like shapes, colors, and simple numbers during early years at home. Poor, uneducated parents often didn't read to their children. Wilmot's kids were starting school behind and were never catching up.

Any solution was bound to cost money, but Wilmot had long since pulled its trouser pocket linings out into the open. Currie took the lead of what was to be a community effort to change things.

Wilmot isn't alone among rural districts when it comes to needing money for not only special curriculum but also for basic educational programs. Residents in thousands of country districts in the U.S. have had to face reorganization and consolidation. They simply couldn't meet increased education requirements with decreasing numbers of students.

Districts have tried. Money spent on education in this country increased nearly 60% from 1980 to 1984 alone, from $86 billion to $126 billion. Per pupil, the cost rose from $1,917 to $3,173.

New educational requirements have been added in response to the now-famous "A Nation at Risk" federal commission report. That 1983 report derided the quality of America's public education, saying it was poor and was getting worse.

The requirements have hit hardest the more than 7,000 rural districts, many of which have already suffered through the farm crisis and manufacturing recessions. For a district, just paying for a basic education program is tough enough, let alone being able to deal with special needs.

Today, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is helping to solve this problem. The program is an Israeli-developed method to help parents teach preschool children basic skills. Simple lessons about words, numbers, and occupations include story books as well.

"At first I was skeptical," says Mary Cole, a 25-year-old high school dropout and wife of a farmhand at Wilmot.

Her son Clemel and his cousin, both age five, didn't seem too interested in the lessons in the beginning. Eventually, says Mary, the two were won over by the word games and the stories, such as *Gary, the Gardener*.

"They like it," Mary says of the program. "As soon as they get off the bus, they say, 'Can we do HIPPY today?'"

Mary's instructor, Emma Bass, began as a HIPPY mother herself. Bass now works part time teaching other parents how to help their chil-

***(Above)** In Arkansas, preschool children like four-year-old Karen Cessor learn some basic skills—such as recognizing shapes—before they enter kindergarten.*
***(Right)** Lois Perkins and Jackson Currie are major forces behind a drive to improve the skills of elementary school students in Wilmot, Ark.*

(Left) Kindergarten aide Lula Washington works with students at a computer terminal in Wilmot. The class's teacher says it is often clear which students have received some education from parents and which students have not.

dren. And Mary Cole is working again toward her high school degree, as are a number of the 40 parents who have used the teaching program for the past two years.

The glue for HIPPY is Lois Perkins, a retired Extension specialist who has kept parents motivated and involved in the program—despite dreary economic situations. "They don't want to see their children have a disadvantaged adult life the way they did," Perkins says. In the process, the parents are helped. They have a higher self-esteem, she adds.

At Oglethorpe County High School in Georgia, the self-esteem of struggling students has been bolstered through the efforts of teachers, administrators, and even other students. A high number of students were quitting high school. During the 1985–86 school year, there were 65 dropouts out of 517 enrolled.

The teachers at Oglethorpe—every single one of them—agreed to fight the problem. They became "mentors" to individual ninth-graders who were considered likely to quit school. As a result, the number of dropouts declined to 30 stu-

(Above) Principal Aubrey Finch made positive changes at his Georgia high school by letting teachers help him tackle problems.
(Left) Troubled rural economies have slashed education funds that come from property taxes. The usual response has been to reorganize and consolidate districts.

dents in 1988. That number represented 6% of Oglethorpe's students, which put the dropout rate on par with Minnesota's, the lowest in the nation.

The unity of Oglethorpe's teachers may be partly because they have as much say in running the school as does Principal Aubrey Finch. An executive committee consisting of Finch and teachers meets monthly, and the members share equally the policy decisions at the school.

Finch came to Oglethorpe in 1983 with the reputation of being a strict disciplinarian whose orders were to straighten out a high school with a lot of problems. Although unaccustomed to sharing leadership at his schools, Finch had a change of heart at Oglethorpe.

"I recognized I could make some surface changes, but for any substantive changes I had to have those teachers with me," Finch says.

As a result, the executive committee was formed. It was this group, consisting mainly of teachers, that decided to tackle the dropout problem. The solution included a tutoring program for students.

These changes came at no extra cost to the school. But as evidence of the "success breeds success" maxim, says Finch, the improvements began to draw attention.

Within the past year, the school has received nearly $200,000 in grants from Metropolitan Life Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. The funds were used to start the Choice and Challenge school.

About 40 students who have struggled in traditional classroom settings, but who have the ability to graduate, are involved in Choice and Challenge. With the new program, students get more individual attention from teachers. They also have the opportunity to spend more time relating classroom material to real life.

For instance, a unit on taxes will involve preparing tax returns. A civics lesson includes watching a court trial in progress. Business principles are related to the operation of a dairy farm.

"We don't have to quit when the bell rings," says Peggy Horton, coordinator of Choice and Challenge and chairwoman of the school's executive committee. "It [the program] is the germ of an idea we think would work better for a lot of students."

Choice and Challenge is an alternative program, but students have worked past any stigma. In fact, they participate voluntarily.

"A lot of the older kids want to be in it, but they can't," says 10th-grader Patricia Parker.

"At first, I thought it was kind of dumb, but then I got the hang of it and I liked it," says 10th-grader Tennyson Hull. "I am going to finish high school, no matter what."

In Oglethorpe County, as well as

***(Above)** Marsha Gabriel tutors Scott Pledger at Oglethorpe County High School.*
***(Right, above)** Choice and Challenge students in Oglethorpe County, Ga., can apply school lessons—like their studies on dairy farming—to the real world.*
***(Right)** Students Johnny Ogle, Tom Bulger, and Jack Eberhart take time out at a dairy operation.*
***(Far right)** Participating in Choice and Challenge often means getting out of the classroom.*

in Wilmot, university and state officials helped school districts with their problems. The Governor's office in Arkansas helped Wilmot officials apply for federal grants worth more than $35,000. This money, thus far, has been spent on HIPPY.

Carl Glickman, who is with the University of Georgia's College of Education, developed the plan for shared governance. "The point is, Oglethorpe started to do things before they had any additional resources," he says.

Local people also have taken the initiative in Tennessee. Many educators contend that the state education funding system discriminates against rural districts.

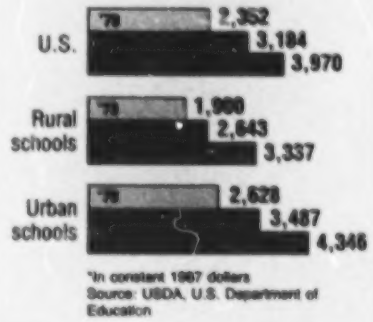
Nearly half of the state's 140 school districts have joined in a lawsuit against the state. They claim that local option sales taxes allow considerably more money to flow to urban schools.

"In our county, two-thirds of our sales tax money goes to other counties," says Bill Emerson, superintendent of Crockett County schools based in Alamo. Population centers such as Jackson in nearby Madison County tend to draw rural shoppers from surrounding areas. The money from Madison County's 1½-cent sales tax for every dollar spent helps that county's schools but does nothing for the shopper's school in Crockett County.

Court documents in the case illustrate the problem. They show that one county collected nearly $950 per pupil in local sales taxes in one year, but another county collected only $65 per student. The problem became acute after 1986 when revenue-sharing money from the Federal Government was phased out.

Court cases alleging various types of discrimination against rural school districts are pending in a number of other states also.

For the past 100 years, school districts generally have tried to increase economic efficiencies through consolidation and reorganization. It is a mistake, however, when consolidation is the only course pursued, according to education experts.



Rural states increased education spending by 3.4% per year during the 1980's. The increases were greater than in urban states, but the dollar amounts remained far behind.

"Some of the very best education is going on in rural schools right now," says E. Robert Stephens, University of Maryland education policy specialist. "We may very well be throwing out the baby with the bathwater if we persist in reorganizing efforts," Stephens explains.

Loren Brakenhoff appreciates the individual attention a child receives in a small school. Brakenhoff, an official with the Nebraska Department of Education, has spent more than 25 years in education.

Nebraska is officially the last state to undertake an extensive reorganization of its schools. Many of Nebraska's schools are tiny, some with only a few students—or even one student—to a teacher.

The changes blowing across the Cornhusker fields cause Brakenhoff to have mixed emotions. When he visits one of these small schools and sees the community spirit and individual attention, he comes away thinking, "I'm not so sure that isn't good education."

Yet a visit days later to a sprawling urban school in Lincoln, with its many class offerings, sports, and art programs, can flip the coin in Brakenhoff's mind. "I gotta say that's quality education too. Who's supposed to judge that? I'm not so sure I know anymore."

By DES KELLER with photos by VANN CLEVELAND

Deer Creek Taps Big City Resources

Deer Creek is a small community on the outskirts of Oklahoma City, Okla. The area has no actual town but is unified by its school where 750 students are enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade.

In the past, the school had been plagued by a lack of funds. There were critical needs for books and updated educational equipment that went unfulfilled. Parents who were worried about a decline in the quality of education there began to brainstorm.

And so, 12 years ago, the idea was born of inviting city dwellers out to the country for one day each spring.

The first Deer Creek farm tour included tours of a dairy, a wheat farm with cattle, a Quarter Horse ranch, and an animal barnyard where children would have an opportunity to pet the residents.

The tour has improved each year. "Children's Days" have been added for visits during the week. Area schools schedule field trips and picnics months in advance. As many as 8,000 students have participated.

Student Heather Bushman gets acquainted with a Vietnamese pig. Photo: Paul Hellstern

The tour costs $3 for adults and $1.50 for children. Local citizens demonstrate quilting, weaving, and butter churning. Square dancing, a jug band, a Dixieland jazz band, a trick roper, and a horse show provide entertainment.

Profits were $500 the first year the tour was held. Now, the event brings in close to $20,000 each year.

The money has been used to buy books, computers, and science equipment, and to finance field trips, art and music classes, and special workshops.

By SUSAN RAMEY WRIGHT

RURAL EDUCATION

Dishing Up Knowledge to Rural Schoolchildren

"What is this?" the teacher asks the class, pointing to the words "see/adler" written on the blackboard.

"Come on," the instructor urges the quiet class. "I'll buy you a Coke if you can figure it out."

This last comment is met with giggles, followed by silence. The teacher shakes his head in mock disgust, then answers his own question. "It means 'sea eagle,' the symbol of the West German Government." He pauses, then jokingly asks in his German-accented English, "Are you always this talkative?"

The dumbstruck German language class at the Alvin C. York Institute in Jamestown, Tenn., may just be star-struck. After all, this is the first time the class members have been in the same classroom with their teacher—even though the school year is almost over.

Harry Wohlert usually beams his way into their Tennessee classroom via satellite from the Stillwater campus of Oklahoma State University.

Twice a week, a one-way video and audio transmission of Wohlert is broadcast from the Oklahoma studio to a satellite that "downlinks" the image to the dish in the schoolyard.

The students communicate with their German professor through a cordless telephone and an 800 number. They also work on computers with language cassettes with the help of their in-class instructor.

This kind of classroom scene is being repeated in rural schools all over the nation. The primary reason is increasing curriculum demands from federal and state education departments to "equalize" academic fare at all public schools.

The ways and means differ. Some schools use satellite links or cable hookups; some use microwave or fiber-optic lines; some use video or computer equipment. The results are similar. Inventive use of technology has helped rural schools in crisis survive and, in some cases, thrive.

"Technology removes the handicap that rural areas have had because of lack of access," sums up Kathy Lewis, director of the Tennessee Center for Rural Education, based at York Institute.

Until recently, most have said that the technology of the future for rural schools was the schoolbus.

- Busing *is* the answer at Miami-Yoder High School in rural Rush, Colo., but with a twist. There, the high school students ride to Pikes Peak Community College, 1½ hours away in Colorado Springs, to take classes for which Miami-Yoder can't afford to hire full-time teachers.

"We outfitted the bus with VCR's [videocassette recorders] so the students can enroll in additional courses that they can complete, working on the bus during their to-and-from time between schools," explains Suzanna Spears of Pikes Peak.

Students also meet with an instructor on campus once a week, adds Don Taylor, program director.

- In the school district of Morning Sun, Iowa, three schools have overcome the costliness of teaching classes that are too small by hooking up a microwave television system. This technology allows students at the three different schools and a single teacher to both see and hear each other through video monitors, explains assistant administrator Bob Nelson.

Satellite programs have one-way video and two-way audio capabilities, and they are less expensive than microwave or fiber-optic systems, which allow both two-way video and audio.

Although the Morning Sun microwave equipment was paid for by a federal Title IV grant, the Government recently seems to have become more fully committed to the less expensive satellite technology.

- In rural Wisconsin, cable TV has become the technological means for delivering education. "We have a nine-channel educational system that connects several school districts and a regional technical school," says Mark Schroeder of Western Wisconsin Communications Cooperative.

Highs and Lows of High-Tech

"People tend to think it's a TV turned on and one-way communication and that's it," says Kathy Lewis of York Institute. "But you'd be amazed at the bonding that takes place. The satellite teachers get to know the students. They call them by name and recognize their voices."

Jim Choike, an Oklahoma State University professor who teaches calculus via satellite, backs up Lewis's observation.

"At one California school where I have three students, Robert is the designated caller," says "Dr. C.," as the students call him. "When one of the other two students has a question, Robert will call and say, 'Eli

(Left) Busing rural children to larger schools is not the only way for country children to have a well-rounded curriculum.
(Below) Kathy Lewis of York Institute is among the rural educators who have discovered the silver lining of technology amid the dark clouds of consolidation.

(Left) Via satellite, students in rural schools across the country are learning German with students at Oklahoma State University.
(Left, below) Visiting satellite teacher Harry Wohlert checks the progress of this class at York Institute.

doesn't want to talk on the air, so I'm asking for him.' But Eli will use the 800 number at other times during the day."

Although most educators agree that the best teaching is still done by the traditional teacher in the classroom, video courses do offer some advantages.

If you don't have a teacher in a subject, you can have the best teachers in the world with this technology, Lewis maintains. Or if you have a weak teacher, it's a way to shore him or her up.

"I've had principals say, 'This [German satellite course] is so far ahead of what my regular foreign language teachers can do,'" she says. Also, satellite classes can be recorded for absent or confused pupils.

"One of the things that the in-class instructors have to commit to is to actually do the work, and not to take a passive role," points out Choike.

In Tennessee, the in-class instructor must be a licensed teacher, but some other states have less stringent guidelines.

"This is a problem they've run into in other states," says Lewis.

"They're bringing in schoolbus drivers to be the in-class facilitators. That could ruin the whole thing. In Tennessee, we're trying to make sure that the technology starts out with the right frame of reference rather than have people abuse it."

Paying for the Technology

Pinning down satellite technology equipment costs is difficult because the need and kind vary greatly. Cost of the educational gear can range from $4,500 to $15,000, not counting the cost of computers if the video course requires them.

The subscription fee, the price paid to the source of the video classes, varies from $300 to $10,000, depending on the source, the course, and the class size. At Oklahoma State, for example, subscription fees start at $600 for 1 student and go up to $2,400 for 4 to 10 students, with another $100 tacked on for each student after 10.

Sources of funding for educational technology are diverse. At the national level, the U.S. Department of Education awarded $19 million in the fall of 1988 to four regional partnerships known as the STAR Schools Program.

(For a list of institutions in the STAR Schools Program, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to STAR Schools, *Progressive Farmer*, Box 2581, Birmingham, AL 35202.)

These consortiums currently are in their second year of funding. They probably will continue with funding from multiple sources, especially since the equipment has already been paid for.

At the state level, departments of education have appropriated large

BioPrep: Preparing for College

Rural students in grades 9 through 12 are preparing for the rigors of college through an academic honors program called Biomedical Sciences Preparation. The program, administered by the University of Alabama's College of Community Health Services, beefs up skills in math, science, language arts, and social studies.

The BioPrep program's goal is to turn out professionals for rural towns.

Satellite technology brings the BioPrep program to more than 1,000 schools in 28 states. Physics, anatomy, and other courses are beamed into classrooms through TI-IN, Inc., the San Antonio, Tex., satellite outfit.

The original purpose of BioPrep, which began in Alabama, was to help decrease the national shortage of rural health care professionals. Now, its expanded goal is to turn out all kinds of professionals for rural towns.

The program is funded by local, state, and federal monies as well as by its initial supporter, the Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation.

Why does the program focus on country schools?

"It was clear that most rural professionals—be they doctors, nurses, accountants, or lawyers—came from rural settings," explains Larry Rainey, director of BioPrep. "Rarely did they grow up in Atlanta, Ga., and decide to move to Boligee, Ala., to practice medicine or whatever."

Rural students often are ill-prepared for college because their country schools don't offer the necessary prerequisite courses, Rainey notes. For instance, one of the participating BioPrep high schools had not offered physics in more than a decade.

Four years after the program began in Alabama, 25 students had dropped out and 6 had moved out of state. Of the 83 who finished, 81 started college the next fall and 2 joined the military. Almost 75% of the students received academic scholarships.

The first BioPrep group will graduate from college in 1990. One-third of them are preparing for health-related careers; the others are planning to enter engineering, law, and other fields.

The acid-test for the BioPrep program will come when the first participants graduate from college. Will the fledgling professionals head for home or for the bright city lights?

"Out of the 2,000-plus kids in the program at present, if we get 20 doctors, even if only 10 of them go back to their hometowns, we've made a difference," Rainey says.

chunks of money to be used to establish programs.

This fall, for example, the Tennessee Department of Education began its $200,000 Distance Learning Program, a large-scale version of the pilot program at York Institute. Each of the 14 sites will cost between $13,000 and $14,000, including the equipment and subscription fees.

"We encouraged the schools that applied to look at long-term use of the satellite dish, not just for classes but for economic development purposes," says Betty Latture, coordinator of media services for the department.

During regular school hours, the schools receive classes from TI-IN, Inc. This is a privately owned satellite operation originating from San Antonio, Tex.

After hours, the satellite system is used for such projects as additional training for industry workers and classes for potential dropouts, such as pregnant high-schoolers.

State educational TV networks also are getting into the act.

In Kentucky, for example, satellite dishes have been installed in all 250 public high schools. All of Kentucky's public schools—about 1,300—will be outfitted by the spring of 1990.

Programming that once aired on the Kentucky Educational TV's land-based broadcast channels is now transmitted via satellite, explains Tim Tassie. Tassie is director of broadcasting at the station.

The ambitious satellite program was provided for by the Kentucky Legislature, which approved an $11.4 million bond issue.

Local businesses or co-ops also may be persuaded to help.

For instance, York Institute received the money for its satellite dish and part of its subscription fees from the Tennessee Valley Authority as a public relations gesture. Since then, many Tennessee rural electric cooperatives have furnished satellite dishes to schools.

If this baffling array of technological wonders and outlets is just too overwhelming, consultant firms like Tele-Systems Associates, Inc., in Bloomington, Minn., can help.

Hubertus Sarrazin, president of Tele-Systems, and his six employees are part of a fledgling industry that plans and implements two-way interactive TV projects for schools and communities.

Sarrazin makes a good argument for his services. "In one state, because there is no competition, the price per mile for fiber-optic lines was $2,200 per month," he says. "Compare that with a deal we negotiated for the identical thing at $30 a month per mile."

Fees start at about $1,000 per school for what Sarrazin calls "a feasibility study."

Legislation affecting educational technology also is on the horizon. The Rural Partnerships Act of 1989 was passed by the U.S. Senate this past summer. A provision of that act, introduced by Senator Wyche Fowler, Jr. (D-Ga.), would fund fiber-optic lines and satellite dishes as well as subscription fees.

"This is not going to be just another Government program," Fowler says. "It will require local leaders, businesses, bankers, and organizations like the Rural Electric Cooperatives and the FmHA all to pull together."

At presstime, however, no matching bill existed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Even if the bill doesn't become a law, Fowler's words are a reminder that caring people will always be the most important component in rural education. But it is the tools of technology that are helping country schools become part of the future.

By NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON *with photos by* **VANN CLEVELAND** *and* **PAUL HELLSTERN**

***(Above)** Satellite technology weakens the argument that rural schools don't "measure up."*
***(Far left)** Computers in country classrooms are almost as common as chalkboards.*
***(Left)** Students from the Alvin C. York Institute have a rich heritage from the past: Their school was founded by the World War I Army hero.*

RURAL EDUCATION

Great Teachers: Still Out There but Needing Our Help

All of us have had teachers who deeply influenced our lives. For some, she was the kind first-grade teacher who welcomed a frightened six-year-old to school. For others, he was the English professor who unlocked the door to Shakespeare.

But during the next decade, a shortage of teachers is looming, especially in rural areas. Two startling facts reveal the problem: One-third of our nation's teaching force will be eligible for retirement within five years, and half of the new teachers quit the profession during their first five years.

There are logical reasons for the talent flight from education. For instance, teacher salaries haven't kept pace with other opportunities for college graduates. Even experienced teachers are leaving the profession for higher paying jobs.

Also, women, who traditionally have formed the big pool of teachers, have other careers to choose from today. And young teachers often say they left because they weren't successful in reaching their students. Sometimes, the teachers also felt that the community didn't appreciate or support their efforts.

Teacher shortages won't be a problem in suburban, middle class school systems. Suburban schools are raising salaries and incentives to capture the best teaching talent.

But for inner cities and rural areas, a different story emerges. Unless rural schools can match the money, administrators may be scrambling to fill positions.

Those administrators do have some attractions that suburban schools can't offer. Clean air, no traffic, beautiful sunsets, fishing, hunting, and the chance to own a country home are benefits that can be used to recruit good teachers to a rural school.

Here are some other tips for getting and keeping good teachers:

- Relieve teachers from chores that take away from teaching. To better use a teacher's time, Mississippi schools employ assistants who supervise playgrounds, listen to children read, and do makeup work with children who have been absent.
- Encourage parental interest.
- Make sure housing is available. In some rural areas, the school board buys or leases houses and then rents them to teachers.
- Offer recreation. Landowners can improve the quality of life for teachers by allowing them to fish, hike, or picnic on their land.
- Obtain the latest technology, such as satellite receiving dishes.
- Help young teachers who've lived in the city make the adjustment to country life.

Rural America does have many good, dedicated teachers. A few are profiled on these pages. They all agree that they can't handle the job alone. Parents, civic leaders, and local businesses need to be involved too.

Dealing With Dropouts

When a youngster contemplates dropping out of Newtown-Harris High School in Missouri, Rick Ayers gets the student to sit down at a computer terminal. Together they figure out a budget based on a prospective job. His crash course in personal budgeting is Ayers's way of fighting the shocking statistic that one out of four U.S. students drops out before finishing high school.

"Some kids think there's not much more to life than a full tank of gas and a $20 bill," laments Ayers, who at 23 easily identifies with his students. "After we do a budget based on a real-life situation, the kids come around pretty quick."

Rural schools need young teachers such as Ayers. His example shows students that education pays lifelong dividends. Teenagers will also listen to advice from a 23-year-old teacher when they may ignore the same words spoken by someone the age of their parents.

Ayers, who has taught vo-ag in this tiny northern Missouri town for two years, wants young people to believe in themselves and in the future of their community.

"Rural America must improve its image," says Ayers. "Why is it that kids who move to a job in the city are successful, but if I stay here to teach and join the family farming business, I'm not considered successful?"

Although he's not originally from Newtown, Ayers has become very active in the town's community development effort. He belongs to a group called the "Dreamers and Doers."

This group is building a city park, and it has produced a video on Newtown that is sent to businesses that are considering a location there. As part of their Build Our American Community project, his FFA'ers renovated a building and painted the local fairgrounds.

But Ayers's decision to teach in a small school district has had its drawbacks. He had to live in senior citizen housing the first year because an apartment was not available.

Then there was the incident at his five-year high school reunion when a classmate asked him what he was doing. When he told her he was teaching in Newtown, she replied, "Oh, Rick, I thought you'd do something big with your life."

"I think what I'm doing is important," says Ayers. "To me, teaching kids in a rural area is just as important as working for a company in St. Louis or Chicago."

Finding Happiness With Little People

Edna Loveday knows firsthand the need for early childhood education. She and her husband, James, have adopted four children. Two of the kids came to the Lovedays as infants. They've done well in school because of their early training.

But the other two children were older when adopted. Edna, who was

"Think positive about your community," Rick Ayers tells his students. Ayers is a 23-year-old teacher in tiny Newtown, Mo.
Photo: Frank Oberle

named Tennessee's 1989 Teacher of the Year, says school has been harder for them because they missed an early foundation.

"Each time I walk into my classroom with my five-year-olds, I am reminded how very important this time in their lives is," says Loveday. She teaches kindergarten in Sevierville, Tenn., a town of 4,566 residents near Knoxville.

She is convinced that parents and the whole community must become involved in education. And she challenges business leaders to join the education effort if they are sincere about raising the intellectual abilities of American workers.

Being involved, according to Loveday, is not simply handing out books or donating money.

"To accomplish true excellence in the education of our children, we need the joining of hands between

***(Above)** "If you are concerned about education, get personally involved," says Tennessee's Teacher of the Year, Edna Loveday, shown with her kindergarten class.*
Photo: Mike Boyatt

***(Left)** "Hardly a day has passed in my life that I haven't silently thanked her for what she did for me," says Gurney Chambers of his first-grade teacher.*
Photo: Mike Boyatt

schools, families, communities, businesses, and our government," Loveday emphasizes.

And the kindergarten teacher adds, "This means a personal commitment from all—not just remote-control interest, but front-line duty."

She Changed His Life

To say Gurney Chambers grew up dirt-poor doesn't completely describe the poverty of his early life.

His mother was a widow with six children in rural Wilkes County, N.C. His father had died from hard drinking at the age of 29. The Chambers family lived without indoor plumbing in their three-room home. The kids didn't have books, nice clothes, or proper nutrition. At school rest period, Chambers slept on newspapers. He usually carried a sweet potato in a lard pail for lunch.

But when the scared six-year-old stepped off an old yellow bus with his lard bucket, he entered the world of a wonderful first-grade teacher.

Zola Barber did much more than teach Chambers how to read and write. She sheltered him as best she could from the taunts of children whose families could afford better clothes and school supplies. Along the way, she gave Chambers the idea that through education he could rise above his childhood poverty.

This caring first-grade teacher provided a spark that propelled him through high school, college, and graduate school. Now, 50-year-old Dr. Gurney Chambers is dean of the School of Education and Psychology at Western Carolina University.

Chambers relives a story that illustrates one way Zola Barber helped him. "One day, we were in our reading groups," he recalls. "By this time—because of Miss Barber's influence and great teaching—I was not in the poorest group. But I wasn't in the best group either.

"I read this sentence, but I didn't get it just right. So Miss Barber asked me to repeat it, asking with great kindness.

"The second time, I still didn't get it right. I can't remember exactly what the problem was. But she asked me to read it again. Being a child with a very poor self-image and low self-esteem, my feelings were easily hurt. I began to cry.

"Miss Barber knew why I was crying. But she also knew that if she let those other children in my group know why I was crying that they would make fun of me.

"So that wonderfully sensitive human being gave me a way to save face with my peers. She said, 'What's the matter, Gurney? Does your stomach hurt?'

"It was OK in Wilkesboro back in those days for a six-year-old to cry if his stomach hurt. I seized the opportunity to save face and said yes.

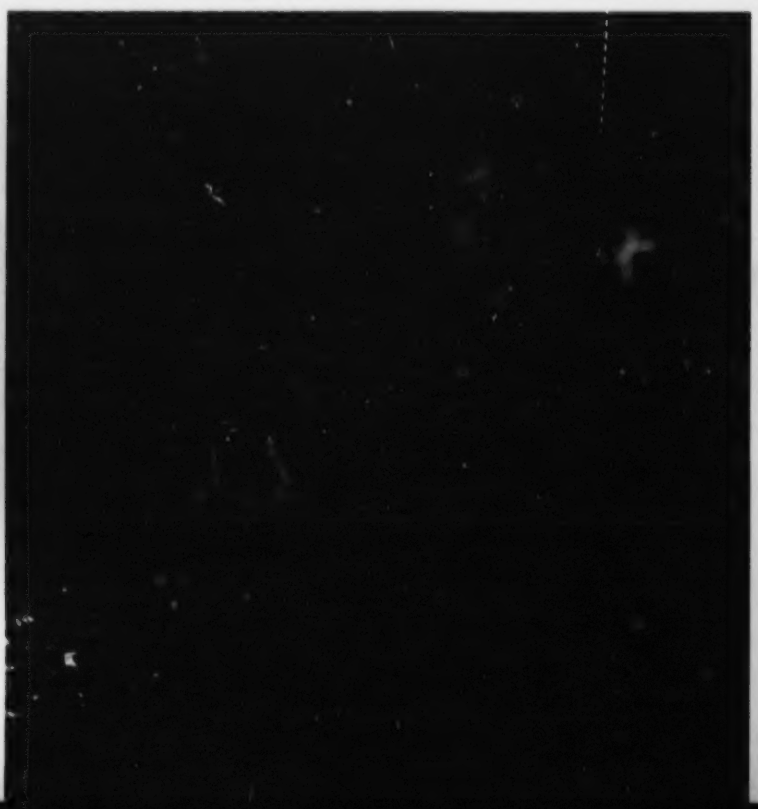
"If you expected a dramatic example of special teaching, you may be disappointed. But if this was such a small thing, why do I remember it after more than 40 years?" Chambers concludes.

Bringing Educators and Parents Together

After two hours of cutting and pasting, Allen and Elaine Boyd are tired but happy. They've made piles of flashcards and other learning aids to help their daughter, Claire, with second-grade assignments.

Finding time for "Make It Take It" night is tough for this working couple from Aberdeen, Miss. And Claire isn't having any great problems with her schoolwork, but the Boyds did see that they were having a little trouble getting her interested in homework. They plan to use the flashcards to work with her on word recognition.

The program is one of many crea-



(Above) Jannette Peugh, a former "Distinguished Principal of the Year" from Aberdeen, Miss., uses creative ways to get parents involved. Photo: Vann Cleveland
(Right) "Kids are hungry for this kind of information," says Susan Forte, who reaches thousands of students through satellite broadcasts. Photo: Frank Hardy

tive projects organized by Aberdeen Elementary principal Jannette Peugh. Her goal is to bring parents into the school. Meeting parents gives teachers a chance to head off problems.

"We want to get other parents involved," says Elaine, who along with Allen is very active in the school's Parent-Teacher Association. "We feel that parents [who are] involved in the early grades will stay interested through high school."

Local businesses also get involved. Through "Partnership in Education," businesses encourage their employees to take an hour to visit their children's schools.

Some of the companies pitch in in other ways, like saving their computer paper for the schoolchildren to use in art class.

In return, the schools invite the companies' employees to use their jogging tracks, exercise facilities, and auditoriums.

In addition to bringing parents and teachers together, Principal Peugh makes a special effort to support her first-year teachers.

"There's an old saying in education that the first-year teacher gets the dirty jobs or the worst classes," she says. "That's not the way here. We try to be careful with their work loads, and we team a first-year teacher with an experienced teacher in a buddy system."

Aberdeen Elementary also has programs to encourage good behavior. If a child does something courteous—for example, picks up a book another has dropped—the child receives a "courtesy coupon." These coupons may be redeemed for a treat at the school's snack shop.

"We're trying to catch children being good," says Peugh.

Teacher Aboard Spaceship Earth

In a way, Susan Forte is a 20th century explorer in the field of education. After 11 years of classroom teaching in Pensacola, Fla., Forte was a finalist in NASA's "Teacher in Space" program. Now, she works through Satellite Long Distance Learning.

For example, Forte recently appeared on a live transmission from The Land exhibit at Walt Disney World's Epcot Center. Students from the University of Florida's School of Agriculture acted as hosts for the program that included information about hydroponics, aquaculture, plant genetics, and tissue culture.

"As I travel to schools around the country, kids tell me that they are hungry for this kind of information," says Forte, who is also USDA's Ambassador for Agri-Science.

"But this technology is developing so rapidly that most teachers haven't been trained in it yet," she notes.

With scientific breakthroughs taking place almost daily, it's nearly impossible for traditional textbooks to keep up. It takes almost five years for a textbook to be written, printed, and distributed. By the time the information reaches students, it sometimes is obsolete.

"Kids today suffer optical overload from all of the media," says Forte. "They've become almost robotic from sitting in front of a TV and not using critical thinking skills. Because we live in a rapidly changing society, today's educators must teach kids how to learn, to change, to adapt."

Together, the NASA Teacher Resource Center and Forte are planning more satellite learning programs. The Epcot show was beamed across the U.S. by satellite and received by dishes at 5,000 schools.

"Our emphasis is on rural areas," says Deborah Harris, who directs the program from the NASA Teacher Resource Center at Southern University. "We're especially interested in reaching children who would never be able to visit a place like The Land exhibit any other way."

By BOYD KIDWELL

***(Above)** Volunteer parents, such as Lynda Whaley of Sevierville, Tenn., prove to both teachers and students that people care about their schools.* Photo: Mike Boyatt

***(Left)** "When Claire sees her parents involved in school, I think it makes her proud and she tries even harder," says Allen Boyd. He and his wife, Elaine, are very active in PTA work at Aberdeen Elementary School in eastern Mississippi.* Photo: Vann Cleveland

RURAL EDUCATION

HOPE Races Through Small Mississippi Town

It's a sun-drenched Saturday in Houlka, Miss., following a week of rain. Activities abound in the grassy townhall square.

In the center of the square, men and women are participating in a cake walk, while beside them, children are playing hopscotch. A table topped with a beautiful quilt is set up nearby. The quilt was made especially for today's raffle by local quilter Juanita Chrestman. A recliner and a sofa beside the table also are raffle items, donated by local companies in this furniture-factory town.

A crowd stands three deep in front of a dunking machine. Other folks make their way to tables that sag under the weight of cakes, pies, homemade ice cream, hamburgers, and barbecue. Children on bicycles decorated with ribbons and balloons begin a colorful parade around the square. Both adults and children ready themselves for the 1-mile run.

Master of ceremonies Rick Huffman, who is both the mayor of Houlka and a disk jockey, is standing just outside the townhall. Martha Wilson, school secretary, stands behind him, handing out T-shirts emblazoned with "HOPE." Everyone in town knows what the letters stand for: Houlka Organization for Pupil Education.

HOPE is what this whole Norman Rockwell scene is about. The field day festivities are just another moneymaking venture for Houlka Attendance Center in Chickasaw County. The school has 535 students, kindergarten through grade 12.

Houlka depends on its community for support. Residents of the town both young and old take part in today's event just as they do every time their school needs them.

And make no mistake—it is *their* school. Even Houlka citizens who have no children or grandchildren turn out to support the school.

Why? Perhaps middle school reading and English teacher Patsy Lusty, who is a native of Houlka, sums it up best: "The school keeps us bound together as community members."

Several years ago when kindergarten classes became mandatory, Houlka had no place for the extra children. HOPE met and raised $5,000 the same night. Another $10,000 was raised through activities like today's field day. The money paid for materials for converting the auditorium into kindergarten classrooms. Parents and teachers supplied the long, hard hours of labor.

"If you don't have the participating people, you don't have anything," says Wayne Buchanan, president of the Chickasaw County School Board. Buchanan should know; he has done his part on the school board for the past 29 years.

The Houlka children consistently score well on all the achievement tests each year. And with satellite technology, Houlka children are able to take "luxury" courses such as Japanese and probability and statistics.

Houlka was one of four Mississippi schools chosen to pilot the U.S. Department of Education's STAR satellite program during 1988–89. (See "Dishing Up Knowledge to Rural Schoolchildren," November 1989.)

One of those STAR students, Houlka senior Albert Moore, Jr., introduced himself in Japanese when he testified about the benefits of the technology for rural children. He spoke first before a subcommittee of the U.S. Senate in Jackson, Miss., and then before a committee of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

Moore plans to major in mathematics in college, partly because of his satellite course experience.

"Another community in our county lost its school," says Pat Hill, a former teacher and current editor of the local newspaper.

In an editorial on the subject, Hill wrote: "Houlkians stood together with their feet planted on solid ground and said, 'No!' Houlkians stood, joined hands and hearts, donated, had fund-raisers, and impressed the outside world with their determination to keep Houlka School. And keep it they did."

Patsy Lusty concurs with the editorial. "We probably had one of the smallest enrollments around," she says. "But I think we weren't consolidated when the push was on simply because of the work that they saw going on."

Each of the participants in this 1-mile run pay $3, all for the benefit of the Houlka school.

Patsy Lusty (above, left) hawks cakes the same way she teaches—enthusiastically. Thanks to a grant, every math student (above, right) at Houlka receives a calculator.

Being able to generate enthusiasm is a useful skill at any rural school. So is a knack for money-scrounging. Superintendent of Education Raymond Paden's know-how is credited at Houlka for the number of grants the school has been awarded.

For instance, the school received a grant to help put into place new standards set by the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics. Now, every child taking a mathematics course at Houlka has a course-appropriate calculator.

Tools are only as good as the teachers who use them, however. And Houlka is filled with dedicated teachers. Lusty taught elementary and junior high English in Biloxi, Miss., and in Atlanta and Columbus, Ga., during her 29-year career before returning to teach in her hometown of Houlka.

There's no question which she prefers. "In Atlanta, I had 38 to 40 students in each of my classes," she says. It was hard to make each one feel special.

"At Houlka, every child has a chance to make his mark in this school," Lusty says. She plans to retire in Houlka.

But even with hardworking teachers, administrators, and technology, Houlka's most crucial problem is hard cash, as it is for most rural schools. And for many of these schools, the immediate financial need is to update facilities.

The school at Houlka has two main buildings—one is 30 years old, the other, 50. It also has several 20-year-old trailers—trailers that are supposed to last 10 years.

"We're using state money to add on to the lunchroom and to renovate the elementary school," Paden says. But that money can't be stretched for new construction, so the local folks must fund new facilities.

Many of Houlka's residents fall below the poverty line and have children who are dependent on the federally funded breakfast and lunch program.

Still, last fall, the school called on the community to fund an eight-classroom building for grades five through eight, allowing all the children to move out of the dilapidated trailers. HOPE raised the money without a bond issue.

A 5,000-square-foot addition also will be built with money from a 3-mill levy on property taxes.

It seems that every time the school has a crisis and calls on the community members, they always come through. HOPE is always there for rural education in Houlka, Miss.

By NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON *with photos by* **VANN CLEVELAND**

RURAL EDUCATION

How We Can Help

For the past year, *Progressive Farmer* has researched and published a five-part series on rural education. Like our readers, we had watched with growing concern as our nation's schools received failing marks time and time again.

In our series, we gave people involved in country schools a place for their own report card. We focused on schools that had found creative solutions to typical problems.

Dollars Making Sense

Lack of money is the biggest problem rural schools face. In many cases, financial woes can be pinned on unequal funding at the state level. For example, every member of the Texas Supreme Court recently declared the state's public education funding system unconstitutional.

In challenging the system, several Texas school districts claimed that low property value prevented them from raising local money on par with that of wealthier districts. Spending per student ranged from $2,000 to $19,000 per year in the districts.

Texas is the 9th state to have its financing system declared unconstitutional in recent years and the 11th to be involved in a legal battle. Equalizing funding among districts appears fair and democratic.

However, critics say this action will only fund mediocrity by lessening local involvement.

We talked to many school officials who had supplemented their state financing with grants.

But getting grants for use in rural schools is tough because of the competition, says Susan Raftery, a rural sociologist with the Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory. The lab in Research Triangle Park, N.C., is one of nine established by Congress to study rural education.

"Right now," says Raftery, "the Ford Foundation is doing quite a bit with rural communities. But it can only fund so many major projects around the country."

Schools that want an edge in this arena may consider sending their best writer to a workshop to learn how to write winning grant proposals. (These workshops are often advertised in education journals.)

"I'm one to go to the Ciba-Geigys or the Pioneer Hi-Breds and say, 'Would you like to get involved with the communities that are still out there actively involved in your business?'" says Raftery.

For most rural schools, financial foraging is their common denominator. Carnivals, candy sales, field days, and other fund-raising events often are vital for the survival of a rural school.

Money alone, however, has never been the sole solution in education. Money spent on education increased by nearly 60% from 1980 to 1984—from $86 billion to $126 billion. Per pupil, the cost rose from $1,917 to $3,173. Yet during this same time, reports continued on the decline of our schools.

So what else does it take to make rural schools work well? Teachers are at the top of the list.

Rural Teachers Need Support

Many teachers may be overworked and underpaid, but they don't have to be underappreciated as well.

Oglethorpe County High School in Georgia has a built-in system that gives teachers a say in running the school. A committee consisting of the principal and teachers meets monthly to decide policy matters. When a school can't increase salaries, giving teachers more power over their responsibilities seems at least an appreciated alternative.

First-year teachers especially need

support. At Aberdeen Elementary School in Mississippi, principal Jannette Peugh tries hard not to overload the new teachers with chores that the more experienced teachers don't want.

The Aberdeen community helps attract teachers by organizing church singles and career classes and by paying taxes for salary supplements.

Creative Teaching Tools

Technology lets rural schools offer the "luxury" courses available at larger schools. Some schools use satellite links or cable hookups; others use microwave or fiber-optic lines; still others use video or computer equipment.

In one case, vans visit schools that are taking part in a University of Alabama-based honors program for rural children. The vans are filled with sophisticated equipment that transforms these country classrooms into DNA labs.

But as Allen Boyd, a parent in Aberdeen, Miss., reminded us, "Teachers can't do it all."

Community Involvement: The Essential Ingredient

When asked why a neighboring town's school was consolidated while her community's school was spared, a newspaper editor replied: "They just rolled over and played dead, but this town did not."

Thriving rural schools are found where people recognize how important the school is to the town's survival. Community members can show they care in many ways.

For instance, in Jamestown, Tenn., many parents were encouraging their children to quit school and go to work. So the school's administration had each teacher develop a community relations program, along with a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program, to get the parents back into the classrooms.

Before the teachers' campaign was launched, the school had seven people attend open house. After the community relations program was put into place the following year, 600 showed up.

At one school in Wilmot, Ark., the problem was first-graders with low standardized test scores. So the school showed the parents how to help their children learn shapes, colors, and simple numbers before the kids started school.

"It's the simple things that work," says Raftery. "It's getting community people to take some kind of vested interest again in what happens in those schools."

By NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON with photo by VANN CLEVELAND

Sources on Rural Education

Appalachia Educational Laboratory* (AEL)
Terry L. Eidell, Executive Director
Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
1-304-347-0400

Arkansas Department of Education
Janita Hoskyn
#4 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, AR 72201
(Has begun, with the Governor's office, several programs to improve the reading and analytical capabilities of preschool and school-aged children.)

NASA Teacher Resource Center
Deborah Harris
Southern University
610 Texas St., Suite 307
Shreveport, LA 71101
(Broadcasts programs covering scientific subjects to urban and rural schools.)

National Education Association
Director of Communications
1201 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-3290
1-202-833-4000
(Covers general education issues, especially political concerns, and focuses primarily on teachers.)

National Rural Education Association
Joseph Newlin
230 Education Building
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
(Involved with issues pertaining to rural schools.)

Program for School Improvement
G-9 Aderhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602
(Offers technical assistance and ideas to a number of rural Georgia districts on such problems as high dropout rates and alternative curriculums.)

Southern Rural Education Association
Bill Clauss
School of Education and Psychology
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 29723
(Involved with issues pertaining to Southern rural schools.)

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory* (SEDL)
Preston C. Kronkosky
Executive Director
211 East 7th St.
Austin, TX 78701
1-512-476-6861

Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory*
Susan Raftery
200 Park Offices, Suite 200
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
1-919-549-8216

STAR Schools Grant Program
Frank Withrow, Director
U.S. Department of Education
Room 502A
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20208-5644
1-202-357-6200
(Program awarded $19 million in 1988 for distribution among four original partnerships to be used for such technology as satellite links in rural schools.)

**One of several regional laboratories that provide technical and financial aid to rural schools. They help in implementing such promising practices as school-based businesses and dropout prevention programs.*